

THE BRAHMI ALPHABET OF NORTH WESTERN INDIA c. 3rd Century B.C. to 6th 200 B.C.

The earliest definitely datable records of North Western India written in the Brahmi script are the edicts of the Maurya Emperor Ashoka engraved on a rock situated at the village of Kalsi in the Dehradun district in Uttanchal state and on a pillar which originally stood at village Topra in the Ambala district of Haryana ^{and} now stands in the Ferozshah Kotla ground in Delhi. The other record of the region assignable to the same period is a small inscription engraved on a rock lying in the village of Pathyar in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. The upper limit of the Brahmi alphabet used in these records cannot be fixed with certainty and the lower limit according to George Birtler cannot be far distant from Ashoka's reign and must fall about 200 B.C.

The Brahmi alphabet of the Ashokan ~~edicts~~ inscriptions has been discussed at length by the paleographers both Indian and European and for our purpose it would be sufficient to ~~discuss~~ ^{examine} the peculiarities of the Brahmi script used in the ~~our~~ records ~~mentioned above~~ which have a bearing on the development of the script in the subsequent periods.

The Kalsi Rock Edicts

- The letters ⁱⁿ of the Kalsi Edicts are hurriedly written and mostly show cursive forms. The following peculiarities deserve notice (see Table col.)
1. The left limb of initial a is sometimes represented by a small vertical or a curved line attached to the right hand vertical by means of a small horizontal bar.
 2. h has a dagger like form but also shows sometimes a highly cursive form.

3. The letter kh has a big round loop at the bottom.
4. ch has sometimes a peculiar shape. It consists of two circles with a small vertical line standing on the point of contact and bearing a serif at the upper end.
5. j which is mostly cursive possesses a loop in the middle.
6. Amongst the Ashokan inscriptions only in these edicts do we find the forms of s' and s.
7. t and y are sometimes written with only two strokes instead of the usual three.
8. No sign for r and n can be traced in this version.

Medial Vowels

The following peculiarities of medial vowels leading to later forms may be noticed.

1. Medial a is occasionally represented by a stroke slanting downwards.
2. Medial e is sometimes marked by a slanting stroke placed over the top of the letter.

The Delhi-Topra Pillar Edicts

In contrast to the Kalsi Edicts the Delhi Topra pillar Edicts have been beautifully executed with care and concentration and the letters mostly show angular forms. The first six edicts display the following peculiarities.

1. Unlike kh of Kalsi these edicts show the letter with a dot instead of a loop at the foot of the vertical.
2. j does not show a loop as in Kalsi.
3. The upper half of m is occasionally made cursive.
4. A rare k consisting of d with a dot below is first seen in these edicts.

Brahmi Alphabet of the Kushana period 2 1st - 3rd century A.D.

The Brahmi alphabet of the Kushana period is represented by several records both epigraphic and numismatic belonging to this period. We, however, confine our ~~paleographic~~ study of the development of the Brahmi script to the dated and well preserved inscriptions of the Kushan kings Kanishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva discovered from north western part of the country mostly from Mathura and its vicinity.

The Brahmi alphabet of these records displays the following developments:

1. The left limb of a is occasionally represented by a wavy line e.g.
2. The bar expressing the length of the vowel in ā is attached slightly above the foot of the vertical.
3. In i the earlier three dots are replaced by three strokes one of which is sometimes placed vertically.
4. u shows a curve at the right end of the base stroke.
5. The base of e is mostly at the top.
6. The earlier straight bar in k becomes sometimes a curved line.
7. In kh the triangle at the bottom replaces the earlier circle.
8. n shows several peculiar forms.
9. d displays larger bulge on the right and its lower end is drawn further to the right.
10. In ṇ the base line is curved, or looped or made angular.
11. In m the triangle at the bottom replaces the earlier circle.
12. y mostly shows a curve hook in the left limb.
13. In sh the two side limbs come closer and the earlier slanting

SOME IMPORTANT SHARADA INSE

stroke becomes a horizontal bar connecting the interior of the two limbs.

14. In ṣ the central bar is sometimes drawn farther to the right and touches the right vertical.

15. ṣ shows occasionally a loop in the left limb.

Medial Vowels

The following developments are noticeable in the treatment of medial vowels.

1. Medial ā is sometimes expressed by a downward stroke attached to the top of the letter on the right side.
2. Medial i and ī are generally expressed by ~~big~~ sickle shaped curves drawn to the left and right respectively.
3. Medial u is expressed occasionally by a curve drawn to the left and attached to the lower end of the consonant.
4. Medial e is expressed by a slanting stroke placed over the top of the letter and may be considered the ~~precursor~~ precursor of the 'Nagan' form. ~~of the matra~~
5. Medial r is likewise expressed occasionally by a curve open to the right.
6. Medial o sometimes consists of two strokes placed over the consonant and rising upwards to the right and left respectively.

Ligatures

1. The letters forming a ligature are usually written one below the other.
2. The subscript ya differs from the initial form and is bipartite.
 both left & right limbs curve on the right in ~~occasional~~ some cases, belonging to the period.
3. The superscript r is ~~represented~~ represented by a short vertical placed at the left top of the left vertical.
4. The subscript r is expressed by a curve drawn to the left.

SHARADA ALPHABET AND INSCRIPTIONS OF NORTH WESTERN
INDIA AND PAKISTAN

INTRODUCTION

The value of the epigraphic records as the ^{mo}west ^uauthentic and dependable source of history and culture in India has been long recognised. Ancient India did not produce any Herodotus, Strabo or Pliny and in the absence of genuine and ^uauthentic written records of history epigraphic records ^yform the Chief original source for the study of the history and culture of India's glorious past. Their value was recognised long ago by the ^usole historian worth the name of ancient India named Kalhana who for writing his history of Kashmir consulted the extant epigraphic records of all types and was thus able to " Overcome many errors" arising from other sources.

The study of the Indian epigraphic records presupposes the knowledge of the Indian scripts in which they are written. These scripts have been a subject of study of scholars now for more than a hundred years and many a mystery associated with their decipherment have been ^uunrav^elled. However, some important regional scripts have not ^ereceived the attention they deserve. The Sharada figures prominently among them.

THE SHARADA ALPHABET

Among the western Himalayan scripts the Sharada alphabet has a pride of place. Evolved from north western Brahmi a millinium ago in the 9th century it remained in popular use for several centuries in an extensive area of western Himalayas including North Western Frontier Province, Dardistan, Kashmir, Jammu, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. Its use in Punjab is attested to by the Gurumukhi script which is the direct descendant of Sharada; ^uwhile its popularity in the Delhi region is testified by the Palam well inscription ^{of the reign of Sultan Ghiyathud-din (Ghiyas-u-din) Balban.}

The inscriptions of the famous Hindu ^uShahi dynasty of Kabul and Ohind and of the ^uShahi dynasty of Gilgit; bulk of extant epigraphic and literary records of Kashmir produced from 9th century onwards; The inscriptions including the copper-plate charters, fountain stone inscriptions and the ^utemple inscriptions of the earstwhile western Himalayan states of Chamba and Kangra; and the legends of the coins of the ^uShahis, the rulers of Kashmir and Mahmud of Ghazni are all written in ^uthis script. Nearly the entire extant manuscripts of Sanskrit and old Kashmiri ^utexts and historical works of

Kashmir are written in the Sharada, besides host of bilingual inscriptions and literary records written both in the Sharada and the Persio-Arabic scripts. These facts considerably enhance the value of the study of this important regional alphabet for the critical study and analyses of the valuable records written in this script and preserved in several celebrated museums and the libraries of the world.

Like ^{the} a Brahmi and the Kharoshthi in the ancient period, the Sharada alphabet in the early medieval period formed a vital link in the chain of communication of ideas, knowledge and culture among the states of the western Himalayan region.

The Sharada alphabet continued to be used in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab upto 13th century when it was replaced by its descendants the Takri and the Gurumukhi. Its use in the Darad territories and the Peshawar region continued upto 16th century while in Kashmir it remained in popular use till the early decades of the ~~current~~ century when it was replaced by the Devanagari with the popularisation of Hindi in the state.

THE SHARADA INSCRIPTIONS

The Sharada epigraphic records that have come to light in the regions mentioned above present a very fascinating study. The inscriptions of Chamba in the absence of any contemporary literary records have been found particularly useful in writing the history of this ancient hill state from 8th century onwards in an almost continuous strain. Fairly large in number and detailed in character they provide useful data for the study of the ancient geography of this hill state and furnish detailed information regarding the social organisation, position of women, administrative set up, agricultural operations and economic and religious conditions of the region. The Sharada inscriptions of Kashmir some times furnish very interesting historical information not known from the literary sources. Being dated invariably, they provide substantial help in verifying the accuracy of the chronology given by Kalhana in his Rajatarangini. The inscriptions of the Kabul-Peshawar region have provided a sound base and a valuable indigenous source for the reconstruction of the history of the Shahis of Kabul and Ohind. The region has also yielded some very important manuscripts of Sharada some of which contain very important scientific and mathematical works. The Baijnath Prashastis from Kangra contain detailed information of the construction of the famous temple of Baijnath besides acquainting us with a family of feudatory chiefs that ruled for eight generations at Kiragrama modern Baijnath and owed allegiance to the kings of Triganta or Jalandhara. Besides their historical content the Sharada inscriptions furnish very interesting information regarding the contemporary social, economic and religious conditions of the regions represented by them.

SCOPE

The Sharada though a very important regional script has not been taken up so far for critical study and analysis. A brief account of the Sharada alphabet has been given by George Buhler in his Indian Palaeography (English Edition) p. 78 f ; by George Grierson in the Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, p. 1916 pp. 677 ff. and some what detailed treatment but based ^{on} exclusively on the inscriptions of Chamba has been given by J. Ph. Vogel in his Antiquities of Chamba State Part I. More comprehensive study of the script has been attempted by the present investigator in Section I of his Corpus of the Inscriptions of Kashmir. Since the publication of the latter work in 1982 ^{lot} ~~more~~ ^{more} epigraphic records and manuscripts written in this script have come to light which have necessitated the revised treatment of the subject in more comprehensive and detailed manner.

The Sharada Inscriptions constitute a very vital and original source of information for the history and culture of the entire Western Himalayan region including the part now in Pakistan. These have been edited only partly and sporadically and even those edited lie scattered in now out of print journals and books and thus inaccessible to the present day student.

The Sharada script and the inscriptions have been my subject of study for the past several years and some papers connected with them e.g. Sharada - the Alphabet par excellence of Kashmir; the Sharada Alphabet of North Western Himalayas-Origin and Development; the Sharada Alphabet - A Link between Kashmir and Central Asia; Social and Economic conditions of Chamba (H.P.) as ^{gleaned} ~~gleaned~~ from the Sharada Inscriptions; Ancient Trigarta and the Baijnath Prashasties; Political History of Ancient Chamba; Fountain Stone Inscriptions of Ancient Chamba; Some ^{place} ~~place~~ Names in the Sharada Inscriptions; Important Sharada Inscriptions of Kashmir- A Socio Political Study; A Sharada Pillar Inscription at Dras (Ladakh) etc.. have already appeared in reputed journals and felicitation volumes. Besides, ^{my} ~~my~~ two monographs Corpus of the Sharada Inscriptions of Kashmir and History and culture of Ancient Gandhara and Western Himalays (based on Sharada Inscriptions) have already been published. The two books have received wide acclaim and ^{have} ~~have~~ been awarded by the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy.

It is proposed to critically edit all the Sharada records discovered to date, from several places in North Western India and Pakistan in ^a ~~the~~ single Volume. The records will include also those discovered by my personal efforts. In the introductory Part I of the Volume attempt will be made to present a ~~every~~ ^{very} very comprehensive and scientific study with illustrations of the evolution of the Sharada script. This part will also include a detailed study of the political history, Socio-economic set up and the culture of Gandhara (NWFP) and western Himalayan Kingdoms of

Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh on the basis of the data gleaned from the Sharada Inscriptions discovered in these regions and belonging mostly to 9th - 16th century.

In the second part all the Sharada Inscriptions discovered to date will be critically edited with Text, Translation, notes and the facsimilies.

UTILITY

As pointed out above, while almost all subjects pertaining to Indian History and culture have received comprehensive treatment at the hands of the scholars, paleography and scientific study of the Indian scripts has remained a neglected subject. The result has been that the knowledge of ancient and medaeval regional scripts of India is fast disappearing. The Sarada is no ^bexception. Unfortunately the knowledge of this important script is fast disappearing threatening the loss of this rich and proud heritage of western Himalayas to posterity for ever. Timely measures are urgently needed to be taken to disseminate the knowledge of the script among the younger generation of the scholars. The knowledge of Sharada script is all the more necessary since a number of very important and valuable manuscripts on medicine, arehitecture, mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, grammar, religion, philosophy etc. written in this script and preserved in the important museums and libraries in the country and abroad long await publication.

The present writer has been approached number of times by scholars in India and abroad interested in the study of unpublished texts of Kashmir on scientific subjects written in the Sharada script and in the study of the history and culture of Himachal Pradesh to prepare a comprehensive treatise on the Sharada Script so that the same serves as a guide book and a valuable aid in their field of study.

The writer³ on the history and culture of Kashmir have been depending solely on the Rajatarangini and other literary works quite unaware of very useful and valuable epigraphic source. Similarly the students of the history and culture of Himachal Pradesh are depending on extraneous sources not able to utilize the very rich and substantial indegenous epigraphic wealth. The authors, both Indian and foriegn, of history of Afghanistan, Darad territories and the NWFP have based their study on the Persian and Arabic ^{sources} not taking very valuable Sharada epigraphic records discovered in the region into account.

The proposed project purports to serve the twin purpose of ^cacquainting the students with the Sharada Script and ^mtaking accessible to them in a single volume all the Sharada records discovered so far, both edited and unedited, having a bearing on the history and culture of a very important region of the sub continent.

METHODOLOGY

The entire study would be based on original records and comprehensively illustrated by paleographic tables and charts and facsimilies of the inscriptions prepared on modern scientific lines.

CONTRIBUTION

The study would be the first complete study on the subject taken up by any scholar in India and abroad and would make a significant contribution to the study of the ancient and medaeval Indian paleography and epigraphy.

SYNOPSIS

PART I : The Origin and Development of the Sharada Script.

SECTION I : Introduction

- a. The name of the alphabet.
- b. The date of its use.
- c. The area of its use.

SECTION II : Origin of the Script.

- a. The Brahmi Alphabet of the Maurya period represented by the extant records of the North-Western India and Pakistan-Special peculiarities(illustrated).
- b. The Brahmi Alphabet of the Post Maurya period represented by the extant records of the North-Western India and Pakistan - Special features and peculiarities(illustrated).
- c. The Brahmi of the Kushana period - special features and peculiarities (illustrated).
- d. The Brahmi Alphabet of the Gupta period represented by the records of North-Western part of the sub continent -special features and peculiarities (illustrated).
- e. The Brahmi Alphabet of the Post Gupta period represented by the records of North-Western part of the sub continent - detailed study (illustrated).
- f. The appearance of the Sharada Alphabet :-
 - A. Early records - 9th. and 10th. centuries.
 - B. Detailed study of the script(illustrated).
 - i) Vowels
 - ii) Consonants
 - iii) Medial vowels
 - iv) Ligatures
 - v) Numerals.

Section III : Evaluation of the Script (Illustrated).

- A. The Sharada records of the 11th to 13th centuries.
- B. Detailed study of the developments.
 - 1) Vowels
 - ii) Consonants
 - iii) Medial vowels
 - iv) Ligatures
 - v) Numerals.

Section IV : The final development (Illustrated).

- A. The representative Sharada records of the 14th. and the subsequent centuries.
- B. Detailed study of the developments.
 - i) Vowels
 - ii) Consonants
 - iii) Medial vowels
 - iv) Ligatures
 - v) Numerals

Section V : The Sharada Alphabet in Manuscripts(Illustrated).

- A. The early available manuscripts.
- B. Differences in characters as used in the inscription and coins and manuscripts.
- C. Aids for determining the approximate age of the Sharada manuscripts on paleographic grounds.

PART II : HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STUDY OF SHARADA INSCRIPTIONS.

Section I : Political History

Section II : Administration

Section III: Social Organisation and position of Woman

Section IV : Economic Set up

Section V : Religion and Religious practices

Section VI : Literature

Section VII: Geographical Data

PART III : SHARADA INSCRIPTIONS
Text, Translation, Notes and Facsimilies.

PART III : ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TAKARI ALPHABET

Chapter I : Introduction

- A. The Name Takari
- B. Dates and area of its use.

Chapter II : The Sharada Alphabet of the 11th. and 13th. centuries as represented by the records of Chamba and Kangra : Special features and peculiarities.